

# GET A GRIP Susan!

My first career was in the restaurant business. I started as a hostess and then a food server, a cocktail waitress, and a bartender. I worked quickly into a management position. I wasn't very tolerant of lazy workers, crazy explanations, and lame excuses. In 1979 at an employee Christmas party, I was given a gift of a bright yellow apron emblazoned with big letters which read **"GET A GRIP"**.

It was a statement I made frequently in response to any craziness by my staff. I would say GET A GRIP and my employee would recognize my displeasure and frustration with their behavior. What did it mean? Cut it out. Wise up. Stop with the lame excuses. Don't lie to me. Get real. Stop goofing off. Just GET A GRIP!

I have come to realize that that is how I was then and how I am now. I like people with good common sense and a certain level of maturity. I'm not good with people who ask for advice and then not take it. I'm not good with people that have lame excuses for their bad behavior. I am not tolerant of people that make the same mistakes over and over. I am extremely intolerant of people that exaggerate every story or just blatantly lie. I am frustrated by people that don't accept responsibility for their actions. Given a chance, I would tell people with any of these rotten (as I see them!) behaviors to GET A GRIP!

So now the joke is on me. As his dementia progresses, Bob has become more and more delusional, super confused, and constantly mixed up. His lack of short-term memory causes him to repeatedly ask the same questions over and over. Bob's lack of long-term memory causes him to not know much of his or our personal history. He sees my suggestions and corrections as my being bossy. Bob's lack of common sense has him making odd comments. His lack of filter has him telling unacceptable

jokes and asking inappropriate questions. Bob tells the same crazy made-up story over and over. He tells lies and thinks they are truths. He recreates history. So many times a day, I find myself thinking, "BOB GET A GRIP"!

But thankfully I don't say it. Bob can't GET A GRIP. Bob can't control his behavior or change his comportment. Unlike my ex-employees, it is not his fault. Bob has no idea that his behavior is something that I consider to be annoying. It's just his disease. It's out of his (or my) control.

So as Bob moves further and further away from the Bob he once was, I must rewire my own old way of thinking and tell myself to GET A GRIP.

**Old Habits die hard.**





Old Ox Pacific Beach 1979 and today in my kitchen!

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## **Corona-virus, California Lock-down, and the Zoo!**

Me: Just a reminder that we can't leave the house due to the Corona-virus.

Bob: I'm ready to go to Corona with you when you are.

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Me: This Corona-virus issue is getting serious.

Bob: I hear that they arrested the guy who is giving the pills to people that are killing them.

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Bob: What are we doing today?

Me: We are staying home and self-isolating.

Bob: OK, the zoo sounds good.

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Me: In a few minutes we can Face Time with your daughter Julie and sing Happy Birthday to her.

Bob: Let's take her to lunch.

Me: She's on lock down. We're on lock-down. Everyone is on lock-down. Restaurants are closed.

Bob: Really? Maybe if it weren't raining we could go to the zoo.

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Bob: I've heard it's a candy that is poison and it's making everyone sick. I've had one in my hand but I haven't eaten it.

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Bob: My golfing buddies called and we're meeting them for dinner.

Me: Restaurants are closed and I never heard the phone ring. Are you sure that they called?

Bob: Yes, and they will be mad if we don't go.

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Bob: I heard a little more about the corona-virus. I promise I'll be on the lookout and make sure no one poisons our food. That would be murder if they did.

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Bob: Will we be meeting our Kinfolk (I love that term) at church?

Me: No, Churches are closed but we can watch church on line on my computer.

Bob: Can we meet them for lunch afterwards?

Me: No, we're on lock-down. Restaurants are closed.

Bob: OK, I guess we can go to breakfast without them this time.

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Me: we can go for a walk as long as we stay 6 feet apart from anyone and don't touch anything.

Bob: How about Sea World?

Me: They are closed. Everyone and Every place is on lock-down.

Bob: How about the Zoo then?

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Me: (while out for a walk) Yikes, something just moved in the bushes. Maybe a lizard!

Bob: Maybe it's that bug that is making everyone sick. Don't touch it!

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Me: After you empty the house trash you should make sure you wash your hands.

Bob: Why? I washed them when I showered this morning.

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Bob: We need bananas. Let's go to the market.

Susan: We are on lock-down. I'll see if someone can pick that up for us.

Bob: We need watermelon.

Susan: We are on lock-down. I'll see if someone can pick that up for us.

Bob: We need marmalade.

Susan: We may have to do without some things until we are off of the lock-down.

Bob: We need cookies. Let's go to the market.

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Bob: How about we go to the mall and shop for birthday presents for each other.

Me: The mall is closed and we are on lock-down. Maybe in a few weeks we could do that.

Bob: OK, do you want to go to the zoo instead?

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Bob: What do you want to do today?

Me: We're on lock-down. We'll just be staying home.

Bob: OK, I'll take a nap. If you decide to go somewhere, wake me up.

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Me: Kyle and Elizabeth are quarantined at home as Kyle was possibly exposed to someone that possibly has the coronavirus. They'll both be working from home for a couple of weeks.

Bob: Oh when are they coming here? Can I go with you to the airport and pick them up?

Do you think they want to go to the Zoo with us?

~~~~~

Bob: What do you want to do for our birthdays?

Me: We'll have to wait and see if we are still on lock-down. We might not be able to do anything.

Bob: OK, How about a cruise on one of those big ships?

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***And this is just Week 1!!!***

**“Think of the patience God has had for you and let it resonate to others. If you want a more patient world, let patience be your motto”**

**– Steve Maraboli, Unapologetically You: Reflections on Life and the Human Experience**

And these are just some of the many reasons Bob loves the Zoo!





















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## My Bad

I'm on the phone with my sister Christie and I hear Bob in the kitchen. I'm not overly concerned as he fixes the same meal every morning.

When the smoke alarm goes off, I go to check. Bob couldn't remember where we keep the toaster waffles so he was toasting my Keto (expensive!) bread and also toasting a frozen turkey burger!!! That was interesting and the dripping grease burning inside the toaster was what was setting off our smoke alarm!

I took the burnt Keto bread for myself and showed him where the toaster waffles were (and always are). I put the still very RAW turkey burger on a plate to microwave it even though Bob was protesting that it was cooked enough.

**Lesson learned:**

**Being in the same house with him is not the same as care-giving.**



Time to step up my care-giving game!!!

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## **Reality Check!**

Some days this disease of Dementia is so real. No getting around it. Yesterday was one of those days.

We started the day with our estate planning attorney. Since Bob's neurologist and primary care doctor have deemed him to be incapable of handling his own personal and financial affairs, we needed to make some changes to my Financial POA, Will, and Health Care Directive. No longer can Bob be responsible for taking care of any financial or personal issues. I will be signing papers for Bob as his "attorney in fact" and Kyle will become the next in charge if I am not able. It was such a real moment. For me. It meant nothing to Bob. He mentioned afterwards that he felt so stupid as he had no idea what we were doing at "that office" and had no idea what "that man" and I were talking about. I tried my best to give a simple explanation ahead of time and afterwards but he didn't get it. Further proof that it is time for me to fully take over our affairs. Reality Check #1.

From there we went to Old Town Mexican Cafe for lunch. It's a place with lots of history for us. We take out of town guests there, have eaten there often with family and friends, and it's the first place we stop after the airport whenever Kyle flies into town. We have eaten there for 40+ years. Bob said he had never been there before! Wow! That floored me. I tried unsuccessfully to jar his memory by telling him of some of the fun times we had there. He ended up saying he thought the food was good for him and that the he memories were good for me. I thought that was so great that he did comprehend that I had memories of the restaurant even if he didn't. I thought it sucked that he had none of his own memories of the restaurant. Reality Check #2.

Lastly, we returned home for an afternoon visit from a social worker from Alzheimer's San Diego. She came to do an assessment for Bob as there is a possibility of getting a volunteer respite care companion for a few hours once a week. We are at the stage where I do not feel I can leave Bob home alone. It seems to have happened so fast and I was praying for a bit more time for him to have some independence. Bob

enjoyed the opportunity to visit with “my nice friend” and he told some of his very interesting stories. Not knowing the real story, his made-up versions of the stories are quite fascinating. The social worker feels he would be an excellent client for them and they hope to find a Companion Volunteer for Bob that will kindly listen to his stories, engage him socially, and become his friend. It’s nice to know that some respite help for me is in the works but it’s sad to think that we are moving into a new stage of the disease where I can’t leave him home alone for any time at all. Reality Check #3.

Side Note: We also stopped at Kaiser to do a Blood Pressure check requested by Bob’s Nephrologist and so I had my own blood pressure checked as well. Mine was through the roof. I can’t imagine why!!

So my prayer for the day was, “Lord, as I adjust to the changes in my life, develop new routines, and face a new reality, please give me comfort and hope and guidance.”

Actually this will be my prayer every day.





Just a few of our many visits to Old Town Mexican Cafe!

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## **LIFE IS BETTER WHEN YOU'RE LAUGHING**

I'm buying tickets for a matinee and Bob is standing back a few feet behind me. Another movie goer (older male) strikes

up a conversation with Bob and asks Bob what movie we are going to see.

Bob responds that he doesn't know what movie we are seeing. Bob continues to say that his wife is in charge and he does what she tells him to do or she gets mad.

Movie goer replies that he understands. He says "I'm married to her sister".

Bob excitedly responds, "That's great. We love Susan's sister Christie!"

Movie goer looks stunned but quickly catches on that Bob might not have understood what he was trying to imply. He talks a bit about how his wife is like me because his wife takes charge of everything in their household.

I thought that was it and Bob understood the man's comment. So on to the movie.

Two hours later, after the movie, Bob asks me if I have the man's phone number. Bob hopes I do so we can call him and see if we can have dinner with him and my sister Christie.

OH MY!!

The movie was entertaining. The laughter was good therapy.

What a great day!

My Guy and His Bossy Wife!!!



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## Gentle.

At Christmas this year I received a Christmas card with a handwritten message wishing me a happy holiday and a **GENTLE** 2020. That wording caught my attention. **GENTLE**. Not happy. Not joyous. Not special. Not blessed. But **GENTLE**. My mind went back to that greeting more than a few more times during Christmas. Several times, I picked up the card and reread those words. Focused on that one word. **GENTLE**.

Today as Bob and I walked, I asked him if he had made any New Year's resolutions. He had. He was going to try to not say things that upset me or made me mad. How my heart hurt to hear those words. Obviously I get angry and am unkind much more than I realize if Bob's resolution is to try to not upset me. Such a sad moment.

So what came to my mind? **GENTLE**.

So my New Year's resolution for myself is for a **Gentle** 2020.

**Gentle** in my actions. **Gentle** in my words. **Gentle** in my heart.

gen·tle<sup>1</sup>

*adjective*

having or showing a mild, kind, or tender temperament or character.

"he was a gentle, sensitive man"

Similar:

kind

kindly

tender

benign

humane

lenient

merciful

forgiving

forbearing

sympathetic

considerate

understanding

compassionate

benevolent

kindhearted

tenderhearted

good-natured

sweet-tempered

loving

mild

soft

quiet

shy

demure

modest

humble

retiring

unassuming

still

tranquil

peaceful

peaceable

placid

serene

reposeful

reverent

meeek

docile

lamblike

dove-like

**So thank you my sweet friend for your Christmas greeting.**

**May you have a *GENTLE* 2020, too.**





*US-Walking* at Lindo Lake

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# The How-To Book for Champions!

I attended my cousins' church with them last month. The pastor talked about the story of Esther and how her cousin Mordecai came into her life and how he was a **champion** to her. Mordecai adopted Esther as a daughter and helped her through many adversities. The pastor went on to explain that often we have **champions** in our lives that support us, love us, care for us, and are always at the ready for whatever we need. He went on to explain that many people start out as a champion but in times of illness and serious problems, the **champion** wears out and can't handle it any longer and disappears.

That message resonated with me. For a couple of weeks now, I have been thinking back to the message that I heard that day. I couldn't get it out of my mind. I would think about people in our lives and wonder if they are or will be a champion that will come along side Bob when needed. Or will they disappear when it gets hard?

But today a light bulb went on. Flash! I realized that this message was not about others, this message was meant for me. I went back to the bible and reread the book of Esther.

Mordecai was a mentor, confidant and cheerleader to Esther. He never grew weary. He stayed true to his faith. He was compassionate to her needs. He used his wisdom to help her make decisions. Mordecai strived to do what is right even in the little things. Mordecai didn't see his responsibility or duties as a burden. He didn't wallow in self-pity. He was a true **champion** to Esther.

So once again, God gave me the instructions on what I need to do to be Bob's **champion**.

I may be re-reading Esther a few more times!



One of my favorite pictures of my guy! Bob with 1 “o”!

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## **Restart. Refresh. Restart again.**

Recently I've been tested to my limits by being a caregiver to "Bob with 1 o". Even though Bob still is only moderately affected by dementia, I see big changes. It's the repetitiveness of his behavior that really pushes my buttons. Bob asks questions that I answer only to have him ask me again within a few minutes and then again a few minutes later. It's watching him forget the name of longtime friends, our relatives, and our neighbors. It's having him say things that he never would have said before (no filter run amok) or telling stories that aren't even close to being truthful (like how he saved my dad's life in the Korean War!). I can't tell you how many times a day I just stare at him in amazement.

Outwardly I may respond patiently and kindly but internally, my mind is not so kind. I'm angry, frustrated, disappointed, worried, and on and on and on. I then start feeling guilty and hate my behavior even if Bob isn't aware of my mean-spirited thoughts.

I can tell myself over and over that Bob has no control over his conduct and that he is not intentionally doing any of the weird behaviors that he exhibits. It is 100% out of Bob's control and being angry with him or expecting him to change is ridiculous. Being kind, accepting, and patient is the only way that I should be treating him. Oh how I wish that were the case.

At the local Alzheimer's Support Group, we are told that there is no guilt in this disease. We can only do the best we can as a caregiver and we need to cut ourselves some slack. It's challenging and we are not expected to be this perfect caregiver in this imperfect situation. I like that and breathe better when I'm reminded of this. Still, I feel that more is expected of me. It's hard to explain but I just don't want to be a loving caregiver on the outside. I want to be a loving caregiver on the inside too.

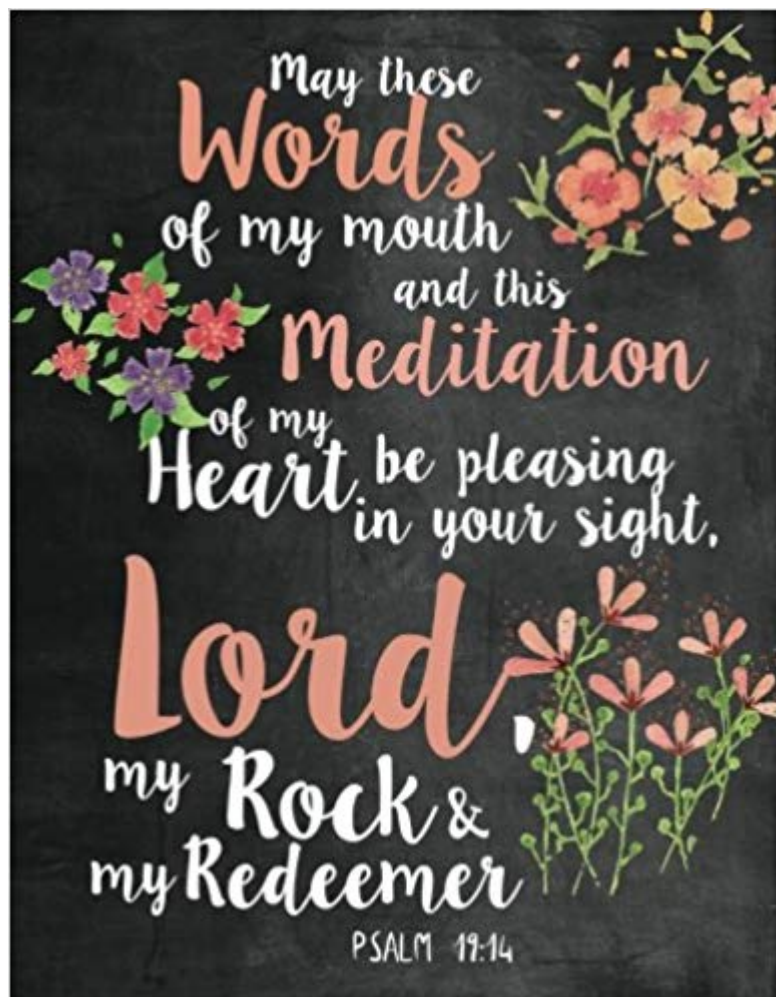
Will I be able to do that? Not today. Maybe tomorrow. It's such a rich blessing to be able to start each day with a clean slate. Sometimes it only takes minutes to be mad and I'll be cussing him out in my head—like when he woke me at 4:30 AM because he thought I slept too long or when he wouldn't shower because he is worried someone was in our house. Within minutes of starting a new fresh day, my mind is already filled with negative thoughts. It's hard to clear the brain and start over.

I want my words, both spoken **AND UNSPOKEN**, to be acceptable and pleasing to God.

My desire is to have the words that I use be encouragement and

comfort to Bob and that my silent thoughts mirror my spoken words. I want to be able to cleanse my mind of all negative thoughts and be able to have a heart and mind filled only with praise for God.

This has become my constant prayer:



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## Let Me Tell You About The Time...

I'm trying my hardest to live in the moment. One day at a time. I've been so consumed lately by Bob's lack of so many

memories of our 41+ years together. We've had a really wonderful life together filled with amazing travel, vacations to fun places, unique job experiences, fabulous family gatherings, holidays filled with family and friends, and precious moments with our parents, siblings, children, grandchildren, and even great grandchildren. We've been blessed beyond measure and those sweet memories are so important to me.

We were spending an evening last week with our friends from my days in the restaurant business. Oh my, how we can laugh. We reminisced over a vacation to Puerto Vallarta in 1988 where we had a houseboy who made us margaritas by the pitcher full, did aqua-ballet performances in the pool, and made fools of ourselves playing Charades. We all just laughed and laughed at the fun we had in our younger years—and those memories are vivid! Sadly, even though Bob was on that same vacation, he doesn't remember any of it. NOT ONE THING. I'm so very glad I still have those wonderful friends in my life to reminisce with.

Not many people know (or remember) but I was married when I was young to my high school sweetheart. It was a short marriage but my big regret over its demise was that I no longer had that person to share my high school and college memories with. I regretted not having the continuity of shared memories. I remember how sad that situation made me feel at that time as I was losing that person that I had shared so many special moments with. Now I can multiply that feeling by 1,000. I am losing the person who I have shared most of my life with. Yes, even though Bob's still here, it's a huge feeling of loss. HUGE.

In sharing this with a friend, I was told not to dwell on the past and not to worry about the future and just focus on today. That's how I try to live but I challenge anyone to spend time with a family member, friend, or spouse without saying "remember when we did such and such" or "remember our

friends that we went with on vacation” or “remember when we went to that amazing party”, or a million other things. It’s extremely hard not to talk about one’s past especially when the memories are worth talking about!

There are so many things that I can’t reminisce about with a friend because they are just things that happened between Bob and me. They seem to fade away and become less vivid as they are never discussed. I try to keep them alive in my head and heart and not let them slip away from me like they have from Bob. We don’t share the joy of those memories anymore and it’s really heartbreaking.

**“Shared joy is a double joy; shared sorrow is half sorrow.”**

Swedish Proverb

So thanks for letting me share my sorrow with you. My load seems lighter already.





Puerto Vallarta, Mexico 1988

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## **This is only temporary...**

Most of you are aware that Bob and I went on an extended vacation to Baltic Sea region of Northern Europe and to Iceland recently. The trip was conceived and planned over a year ago when Bob was doing "better". Bob's mental capacity has really declined in the last year but I was still optimistic that he would do well on the trip and enjoy it. It was hard on Bob and that made the trip hard on me. We are

home safe and sound now but I can say with 100% certainty that we won't be going on any international or extended trips ever again! We went out with a bang!

There are lots of great moments of our vacation but there is one that is a standout moment for me.

On the last leg of our flight home (Minneapolis to San Diego), Bob was behaving quite anxiously on the plane. He was concerned that someone had moved our carry on bags and that they were stolen. He kept trying to get up and get them down from the overhead compartment. I kept telling him to sit and relax, that all was fine. He wanted to warn the young women in front of us that if they had placed things under the seat and that they should keep an eye on them as they might get stolen. Bob told the young man in the row ahead of us that his carry on bag was under the seat several times. He was worried that the young man might lose his bag. Then he thought that the young man's bag might be our own bag that was "missing" and he wanted to get it and hold on to it! He told the airline attendants that one of the young women ahead of us had lost her straw hat and bag and that he knew where they were. He even took the woman's hat and handed it to her. She thanked him and placed it back under the seat in the same place!

He was so anxious and agitated that I didn't go to the bathroom when I needed to (badly) because I wasn't sure what he would do if I left him in his seat alone. He wouldn't buckle his seat-belt and continually wanted to stand up and find our carry on bags. It was a nerve wracking 4 hour flight. The last leg of a 24 day trip didn't go too well!

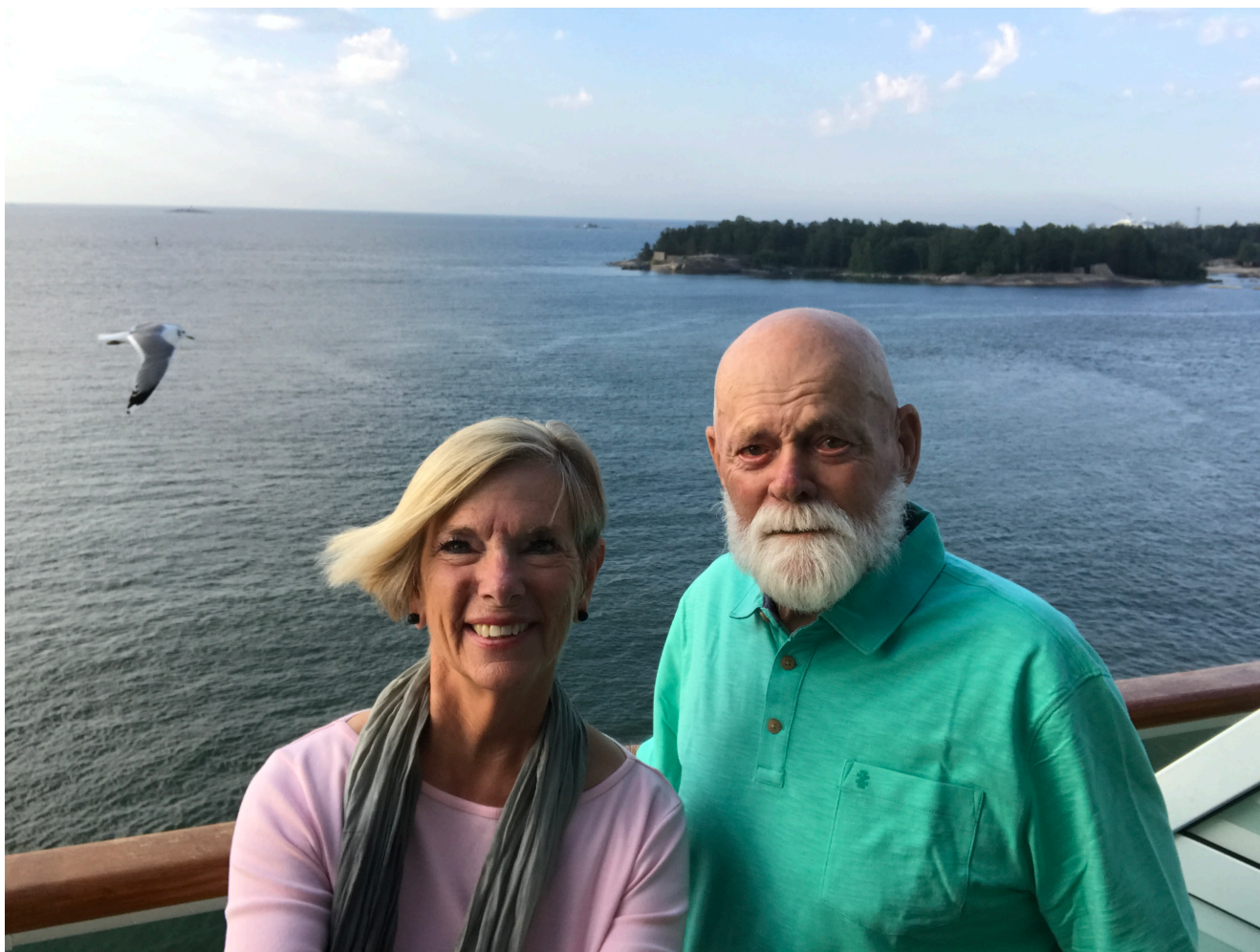
Once we landed in San Diego, my first stop was the bathroom. Bob waited outside for me.

At the sink while washing my hands, one of the young women who had been in the row ahead of us came to me and asked if she

could give me a hug. I welcomed her hug but what happened next was so unexpected and wonderful. She told me that “all of this is only temporary” and that I would have an eternal life without worries, pain, and problems with my husband in heaven if I believed in Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior. I gave her the biggest hug and through my grateful tears, I thanked her for her much needed reminder of our salvation in Christ.

How lovely for this young woman to care enough to share the Gospel with me at one of my low points. Boy isn't it amazing that God places the people you need in your life at just the right time.

I left the restroom feeling like a new person. I gave Bob the biggest hug! I was ready to take on the challenges we are facing during this brief period on earth.



Us on our cruise ship balcony as we sailed into Sweden .

Thanks to the seagull for photo-bombing us!